

GIFTS FOR GUNS

In 2005, the City of Compton and the unincorporated county areas saw a dramatic increase in violent crimes and homicides. This spike led Compton Station personnel to design alternative measures to reduce the escalating violence. Deputy Anthony Rotella and Lieutenant Joseph Gooden updated a program, “Guns for God,” conceived



by then Compton Station Captain Cecil W. Rhambo Jr. They created a unique program entitled “Gifts for Guns,” providing Compton residents the opportunity to safely surrender any unwanted firearms to Compton Station personnel. In exchange for the firearm, the community members would receive a gift card redeemable at a local business. The Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department partnered with the City of Compton, Circuit City, and Ralphs grocery stores offering a \$100 gift card for each firearm surrendered.

The biggest challenge of the program was to ensure the residents understood that the process was completely anonymous, and

no questions would be asked of the person surrendering the firearm. All weapons were collected by Sheriff’s Department personnel at a booth set up in the parking lot of the Compton Circuit City/Ralphs shopping center over the course of three consecutive Saturdays.

During the course of the program, media from as far as England and France traveled to cover the success of the program. Local media covered the program and marveled at the flow of residents dedicated to help make their community safer. In the first year of the program, 640 weapons were safely surrendered. Of those 600 weapons,

many were assault weapons. The “Gifts for Guns” program has grown exponentially in popularity. In 2009, the Sheriff’s Department expanded the program to include all 23 Sheriff’s stations. Since the program’s inception in 2005, more than 1,800 weapons have been safely surrendered.

